The Ballarat Naturalist

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Brolga Delight - Hamilton SEANA Event

On the weekend of April 17/18th Hamilton FNC hosted the autumn SEANA weekend assisted by members from Warrnambool and Portland. Over 120 people attended including 9 from Ballarat.
We enjoyed choosing from a wide range of excursions offered, as well as feasting and being stimulated by guest speaker talks each evening.
A highlight for me was, on the Saturday excursion , visiting four different swamp areas that have been restored as wetlands through the work of the Nature Glenelg Trust. One of the evening guest speakers also talked about this.

Greens Swamp, now home to hundreds of Brolga

The first we came to, Greens Swamp, delighted us with the sight of 168 brolgas who have now claimed this spot as one of their flocking sites. Also, about 120 black swans, shelducks, white faced herons, and masked lapwings were also viewed.

This swamp land was reclaimed around 5 years ago in co-operation with land owners and some land purchase. The brolgas have been increasing in numbers since that time. The wetland still has some drier periods which are beneficial to many other waders.

At the next stop, Walkers Swamp, we visited the bird hide tower overlooking the lake and then inspected the drain which was built around 1900 to drain the area for farming. However, much of this land wasn't productive. The Nature Glenelg Trust placed sandbags covered with 'geofabric' over the drain forming a dam wall and there has been a marked increase in the water volume of the swamp since that time. This will now become a permanent structure.
Field Nats will remember the presentation given by Dr Greg Kerr in December 2019 on this very subject and it was great to see these wetlands at their best.

Val Hocking

Spotting a new species of hawkweed in Victoria

A new hawkweed species has been recorded in central Victoria and appears to be the first of its kind in Australia. The suspect plants were spotted by an Agriculture Victoria staff member when he noticed small rosettes with hairy, spotted leaves invading potted plants at the property he was visiting. The officer removed the infested pots, one of which was kept so that the identity of the plants could be investigated further, and all other pots were destroyed.

Hawkweeds, which include hundreds of species from both the Hieracium genus and the Pilosella genus, can be very difficult to identify, even for trained botanists. To identify the plants to species level, a botanist must look closely at the tiny seeds or use genetic testing.
After a leaf sample was sent to the National Herbarium of Victoria for genetic testing, the plant was identified as genus Hieracium.

The plant is currently being securely kept in the Agriculture Victoria glasshouse. The mystery Hieracium is being cared for and eagerly watched by Agriculture Victoria staff so that when it buds, flowers, and seeds, they can be collected for identification. By using a microscope to analyse the seeds, Agriculture Victoria staff and taxonomic botanists at the Herbarium will be able to confirm the species' identity.

Agriculture Victoria suspects that this hawkweed species is Hieracium maculatum, also known as spotted hawkweed. The leaves of this species have distinctive purple blotches and mottling. However, until botanists can look at the microscopic characteristics of the seeds, the identification cannot be confirmed.

The sample plant will be kept at the Agriculture Victoria glasshouse to be used as a display plant and as a reference for future detections. It can also contribute towards Victoria's genetic library as the results from the genetic tests can be added to the Herbarium's library for identifying any future new hawkweed infestations.

All hawkweeds are declared as State prohibited weeds in Victoria, so if you see any suspicious plants, please report them by calling 136 186 or emailing weed.spotters@agriculture.vic.gov.au.

Thanks to Bernadette Cheesman for sourcing this article.

Coming up Calendar of Activities

Friday May 7 Club meeting 7.30 pm at Ballarat Nth Community Centre, Cnr Walker St and Armstrong St Nth.
Enter Carpark from Armstrong St Nth. Enter building from Carpark. Neil Anderton from the Australian Native Orchid Society will talk about threatened orchid conservation in the Inverleigh Nature Conservation Reserve.

Saturday *May 8* Excursion to Creswick Forest led by John Petheram and Roger Thomas. Meet at Gillies St. 9.30 am to car pool or at Koala Park, Creswick no later than 10.00 am to explore Koala Park, Cosgrave Reservoir and some less familiar sites.

Friday June 4 - 7.30 pm at Fed Uni building, Gillies St. John Walter from Wombat Forestcare will talk on Fungi of the Wombat Forest.
Sunday June 6 Fungi in Wombat Forest led by John Walter.

Friday July 2 - 7.30 pm John Gregurke presents The Simpson Desert, and Bill Elder on "Photomon", our new photo-monitoring tool.
Sunday July 4 Field Trip to a selection of sites to demonstrate the use of Photomon led by John Petheram, Bill Elder and Graeme Lunt.

Out in the Field

The April excursion took 22 field nats south of Ballarat on a cold and wintery autumn day. First stop was Brewery Dam in Smythesdale where most people donned gumboots, woolly hats and raincoats

Birds seen at Brewery Dam: Purple Swamp Hen, Dusky Moorhen, Australian Raven, Crimson Rosella, Grey Fantail, Scarlet Robin, Silvereye, Superb Blue Wren, New Holland Honeyeater and Laughing Kookaburra.

One interesting plant encountered here was *Centella cordifolia* (Pennywort), identified by John G. Pennywort is a mat-forming herb with round or heart-shaped leaves and clusters of tiny white to purple flowers. It is widespread in Tasmania and Victoria in wetter areas.

Centella cordifolia Pennywort
Photo: wsbn.org.au)

Fungi was also making an appearance early in the year with a number of common species observed. And orange is April's colour.

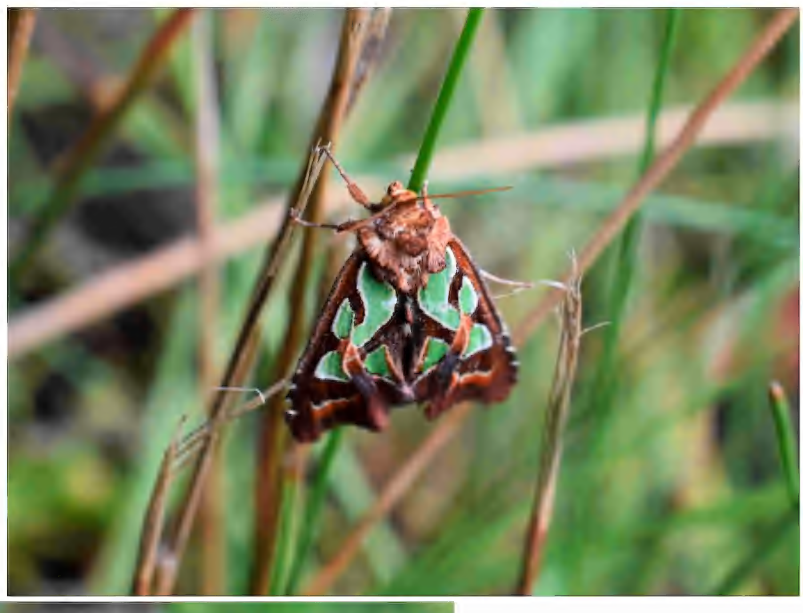
Gymnopilus junonius

Amanita muscaria

Golden Jelly-bells
Heterotextus miltinus

Photos:
Carol Hall

Of course, no field nats trip would be complete without insects and these two spectacularly colourful moths were photographed by Susan Kruss.



Green-blotched Moth
Cosmodes elegans

Tussock Moth
Orvasca sp.

The second stop, at "Stringybark", Bill and Kathy Elder's property in Scarsdale yielded one new plant to add to their plant list, but not a lot else. This was the Dwarf Geebung *Persoonia chamaepeuce* and the next page tells the story.
The group did enjoy a walk around the property of eucalypt woodland follow by a warm fire and convivial company during lunch before moving on to "Lilwarre", Emily and Peter Noble's place in Monkey Gully. Again, the birdlife was sparse and there were but a few fungi on show. The highlight for the group was checking the significant progress of the Nobles' house with it's roof in place and a good number of windows and some externals walls as well. Newcomers were suitably impressed by the scale and detail of the building and the couple's skill and pride in their achievements, thus far.

This message came in a day or two after the excursion…

Hello Bill,

Glad you sent the picture.

I said Pultenaea humilis, Dwarf Bush-pea, on the walk today.
But that is WRONG. I should have had a closer look!

From your picture I now think it is Persoonia chamaepeuce, Dwarf Geebung. I know this plant from a couple places in Woowookarung R.P. It has yellow flowers in summer.
Check it out on Flora of Victoria website.

I enjoyed the well attended excursion today. Much better to be out in the bush rather than sitting at home with the heating on.
We were lucky the heavy showers came when we were driving.

Regards, John (Gregurke)

Dwarf Geebung at Stringybark

The Rat Nats—Juniors Group

Rat Nats regulars Leon and Audrey were lucky enough to join with the larger Juniors group from FNCV Melbourne over the Easter weekend.

The juniors went to a private property near Stawell and enjoyed each other's company plus the owner's five dogs, several goats & two camels!

At the beautiful Botanic Gardens in Halls Gap

Field trips were to places in the Grampians/Gariwerd National Park including Halls Gap, Bunjil's Shelter, several lookouts, Zumsteins Historic Area on the McKenzie River, and Clematis, Chatauqua and Silverband waterfalls. We got a guided tour of the Botanic Gardens in Halls Gap and a pleasant walk (on a particularly warm morning) to the Venus Baths where both children and adults indulged in a dip in the cold water of Stony Creek.

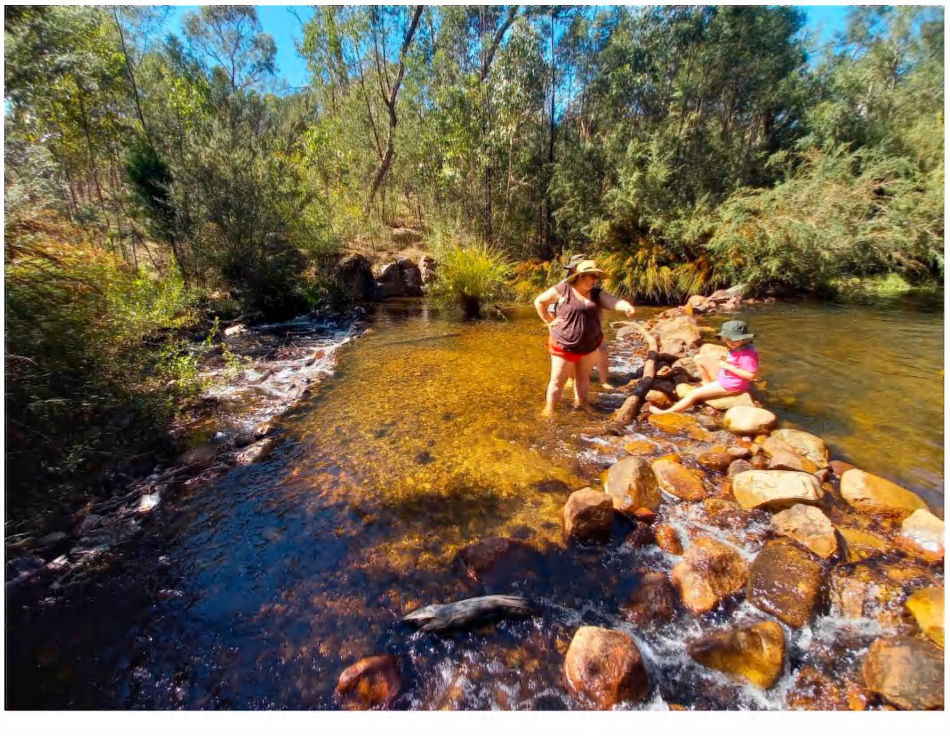
On Sunday evening, both Leon and Audrey joined in the concert around the campfire and wowed the audience with poetry and song and dance, earning them some chocolate treats!

Feeding the camels was a highlight for most of the young ones. The camels managed to eat quite a large amount of carrots.

We had a fun time visiting new places and meeting new friends

Looking south from Reed Lookout on Mt Victory.

Keen kids feeding Carrot-crazy Camels!



The McKenzie River at Zumsteins

What's Going On?

There being no minutes from a Club meeting in April due to Easter, we present some information on our plans for the SEANA weekend coming up in late October.

The committee has been working on venues and speakers as well as devising some exciting excursions to local nature spots which we hope will inspire and delight visitors. We will run full day excursions only, but visit more than one site during some of them.

Features places include obvious Ballarat "go-tos" Woowookarung Regional Park, Lake Wendouree, and Clarkesdale. But, we are also offering a tour of some Trust For Nature properties led by one of our local TFN officers. The properties are owned by Field Nats members, but belong to everyone!

We are so lucky to have so many members who are keen to lead excursions and also to help behind the scenes as or facilitators or marshalls. This is a collective effort by the entire Club.

We will be limiting the numbers for each field trip to comply with whatever COVID restrictions are in place at the time, but we trust that there will be plenty of room for regular members to join in this special event.

Stay tuned for more information on costs, registration, etc for the SEANA weekend - Friday 22nd to Sunday 24th October, 2021

Membership Renewal Reminder

Membership fees are now due covering the year to March 2022. Your contribution allows us to provide *The Ballarat Naturalist* in full colour every month (by email as a PDF file).

As a member you are invited to attend meetings and excursions, as well as vote at General Meetings. You are covered fully by the Club's insurance policies. You also have access to a library of books and other resources.

Membership can be paid by EFT to our Bendigo Bank account: BSB 633-000 A/c 11911 2290, use your name as reference. OR by making a deposit of the correct amount at any Bendigo Bank branch using the details above.

Ordinary Member (Adult)	$35
Family	$55
Distant Member	$20
Student Member	$15
Newsletter postage (if requiring paper copy of Newsletter)	$12

Welcome to new members!

This month the committee endorsed the membership of Marlea Hutson.
Please make her welcome at the next meeting or field trip.

<u>More from the Rat Nats</u>

April saw the juniors attend a couple of events during the school holidays in addition to the Easter camp. Pictures below show Leon enjoying our big bonfire, which attracted some new juniors and a large Swift Moth (*Abantiades* sp.)

Rat Nats Facebook friend Tonya Lewis posted this great photo and comments…

"Found this spider on it's web across the dam. The web is several metres long with the middle round shape being about a meter wide. The spider is as big as the palm of my hand, bigger if it spreads it's legs out. I'm guessing it's a golden orb spider, but I've never seen one so big!

Thanks Tonya!

Excursions and Meetings in 2021 - Fill your Diary!

For more details, see p.3

May 7 - 7.30 pm Club meeting at Ballarat Nth Community Centre, Neil Anderton - threatened orchid conservation
May 8 (SAT) Excursion to Creswick Forest led by John Petheram and Roger Thomas.

June 4 - 7.30 pm John Walter Fungi of the Wombat Forest.
June 6 Excursion Fungi in Wombat Forest led by John Walter.

July 2 - 7.30 pm John Gregurke presents The Simpson Desert, and Bill Elder tells us about "Photomon".

There are currently no number limits for excursions, however health restrictions still apply, so please bring a mask and keep distance of 1.5m between people. Of course, if you are not well or suffering any flu-like symptoms, please stay at home.

Note: After the May meeting, meetings will again be held at the Federation Uni campus in Gillies St. No supper is scheduled for meetings at the moment, but people are free to stay and talk with friends after the meeting.

Committee

President	Bill Elder
Secretary	Emily Noble
Treasurer	Kathy Elder
	Andy Arnold
	Bernadette Cheeseman
	Val Hocking
	Graeme Lunt
	John Petheram

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Meetings - due to COVID-19, meetings may have number limits applied. Members will be kept informed of meeting venues and restrictions as needed.

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